

National Road Started In 1834 in Vigo County

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

A force of men began the actual construction of the National Road through Vigo County in the spring of 1834. The work began at Indianapolis and from there was pushed east and west. Contractors with their gangs of men, their carts, wheelbarrows, picks, shovels and axes, cut down the trees and threw up the road bed.

As the first uplift from the seas of mud and mire that at certain seasons had fairly blocked the whole country and made travel of any sort next to impossible, the National Road was of immeasurable benefit. The dreariness and toil of travel and communication was to be eased, hitherto unbroken forests were to fall back on either side of this pathway driven straight through the heart of the state. From boundary to boundary there was to be 149 miles of well-built highway, opening the inland sections of the state to settlement and commerce. Well might the citizens have been elated over the good fortune governing Terre Haute's location.

The government superintendent of the work through this section was Major Ogden of the U.S. Army. Under his direction substantial structures were thrown across the larger streams by capable engineers who placed them beyond the reach of the raging spring freshets that had mocked the feeble attempts of the settlers to bridge them. Many of the bridges were covered bridges.

Over a half a million dollars was spent in Indiana upon bridges alone. While the majority of the old covered bridges had given way to modern iron bridges one in this vicinity still stood after 1900. The old red wooden covered bridge over Sugar Creek just beyond Macksville (West Terre Haute) was built between 1838 and 1840 when the largest force of men employed on the road in this vicinity were at work. Its timbers were still sound some 65 years later.

A long covered bridge was thrown across Lost Creek near what is now 19th street,

and older residents remembered it as the "yellow bridge." Years after the course of Lost Creek was changed causing it to flow into the Wabash river north instead of south of the city, the yellow bridge stood high and dry. Just previous to the Civil War it was removed and re-set across Otter Creek at Markle's Mill.

West of this yellow bridge the road was macadamized a mile or more through the swamp, the stone being hauled from Hepler's quarry near Putnamville. Preparations were made to bridge the Wabash, and material for the piers was brought from the same quarry.



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Even after the Ohio street bridge was built in 1847 it often proved useless for weeks at a time owing to the high water. There was no grade across the bottoms, only a way cleared through the trees south of the present road, so when the river was up the ferry plied all the way to Macksville. Sometimes the bottom lands were covered to a depth that prohibited fording and was not sufficient to allow the passage of the ferry-boat. Then travelers and mails were transported in skiffs but immigrants and wagoners were often obliged to remain two or three weeks in Terre Haute or Macksville awaiting opportunity to cross. McQuikensville was the

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original name of the little settlement across the river. It was founded in 1834 by Samuel McQuilken who built the first house to accommodate the men at work on the road.

The construction of the National Road was carried on until various circumstances brought an end to the work. The unprecedented prosperity which had allowed internal improvements brought with it, unfortunately, reckless speculation, which in turn involved the country in the great panic of 1837. During the political and financial disturbances which followed in the next few years, work on the partially completed road was stopped.

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A tremendous amount had been accomplished, for although it had not reached the high standard specified and fulfilled on the eastern division, the road was the pride of the state and by far its best and greatest highway.

Traffic west never equalled that east of Wheeling, but there was the same dash and freedom, and owing to the newness of the country, the dangers of travel were far greater. Throughout the length of the road from Cumberland west there grew to be a striking similarity in customs and pursuits of the dwellers in the towns and villages.

The establishment of a daily line of mail coaches to Indianapolis and the east in 1838 marked for Terre Haute the real beginning of the National Road era. Greatest of all the glories of which the National Road could boast were the dashing mail coaches. There was a fascinating grandeur, a certain mysterious and awe-compelling dignity to young and old alike in their flight with the government mails.

To get down an ice covered hill safely it was necessary to use two contrivances which every coach carried, an ice cutter and a rough lock. Failure to use them was apt to mean disaster. The ice cutter was iron of steel much like a small sled in appearance, the hind wheels being securely locked, this was clamped to one of them and the rough lock, a short chain with large links, to the other. With these attachments it was usually possible to keep the rear wheels from slipping off the roadway.

Mail Sent Ahead

In case a stage overturned and the passengers were not too badly bruised, they would assist in righting it, otherwise help was procured from the nearest farm or settlement. When damage to the coach was too great, the front wheels were detached and the mail sent ahead.

Coaches floundering through mud and ice often stalled and if the travelers' attempts to pry them out with rails proved futile, it was necessary to resort to the aid of oxen or horses brought from the nearest farm.

During March and April the road was always in a worse condition than at any other time. Then light and strongly built wagons seating about four passengers and carrying mail boxes were substituted for the coaches. Occasionally it was impossible for even these mud wagons to get through the bad places and a ~~wooden~~ crate on two wheels drawn by four horses would transport the precious mails.

Uncle Sam was almost as particular regarding the transportation of the mails in the 1840's as at the present time, and it meant a heavy forfeit if the stage companies failed to deliver them on time. There was, however, one excuse which the drivers never failed to take advantage of, high water. Coming to a deep ford they would unhook one of the horses and ride carefully across, apparently picking a way, well knowing that the passengers would report this delay.

Frequently enough, however, there was genuine trouble and serious accidents would happen. In attempting to cross a ford west of here a stage and four horses were swept downstream and under a drift of logs. The gravel bed had washed out just at the crossing and the driver, ignorant of this, urged his horses into the swollen creek. Fortunately there were no passengers and the driver clung to the drift and wreckage. Swimming ashore he made his way to the next stop where he found help and after a great deal of trouble recovered the mails which were sent on to Terre Haute.

In the spring of 1848, Jerry C. Hidden, a stage driver on the Terre Haute and Springfield road, was called as a witness in a noted mail robbery case. The prisoner against whom he was to testify had obtained keys to both the through and way mail pouches and had offered to supply some of the drivers with duplicates for a share in the plunder that they might reap by rifling letters. This man had operated through Ohio, Indiana and Illinois for some time in spite of the fact that his description had been given by Mr. Hidden and others whom he had approached. He was finally captured, arraigned before the U.S. Circuit court at Indianapolis and a day set for the trial.

Old National Road Was Challenge to Travelers

By DOROTHY J. CLARK Community Affairs File

It was not just that the Ohio, alone among important rivers in North America, flowed from east to west, and that the tide of humanity was running westward, for there were other feasible westbound routes.

In the north, there were the Mohawk Valley and the Great Lakes. There was the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap, for many years the safest route for settlers. The great National Road, of course, traversed the Appalachian barrier and terminated for a while at the banks of the Ohio, reaching Columbus, Ohio, in 1833.

But with the exception of the Mohawk Valley route, traversed by the Erie Canal by 1825, all other routes but the Ohio were land routes. The superior ease of floating goods in a boat compared to hauling them by pack horse, wagon, or on foot must have been a paramount consideration for the weary, footsore immigrants on the National Road by the time they caught a glimpse of the Ohio river at Wheeling, and many of them proceeded to float the rest of the way to their new homes.

Charles Dickens was a traveler on the National Road in 1842, and wrote of his experiences telling how "... the road we went over that day



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was certainly enough to have shaken tempers that were not resolutely at Set Fair, down to some inches below Stormy. At one time we all flung together in a heap at the bottom of the coach, and at another we were crushing our heads against the roof. Now, one side was down deep in the mire, and we were holding on to the other. Now, the Coach was lying on the tails of the two wheelers; and now it was rearing up in the air, in a frontic state, with all four horses standing on the top of an insurmountable eminence, looking coolly back at it, as though they would say, "Unharness us. It can't be done" ... A great portion of the way was over what is called a corduroy road, which is made by throwing trunks of trees into a marsh, and leaving them to settle there. The very slightest of the jolts with which the ponderous carriage fell from log to log was enough, it seemed, to have dislocated all the bones in the human body ..."

The present day traveler on old National Road, or U.S. 40 as we know it now, finds little to remind him of the palmy days of the 1840's when all was activity along this great highway between East and West.

Forgotten by the cities that once considered it of great importance to be located along its line, the old pike and its history are slowly being forgotten.

Generations have come and

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gone since the lumbering stage coaches sped along with their loads of passengers, mail and small shipments of goods through fair weather or foul, day or night.

Jovial landlords offered the easy hospitality of the new country. All that made the old National Road what it was has long since been swept away in the march of progress.

In this day and age when the country is covered with a network of superhighways, railroads and air lines, it is difficult to realize the value of this road to our forefathers.

At the beginning of the last century the stout hearted pioneer pushing westward toward the fertile valleys of the Ohio found the Allegheny mountains an awesome barrier across his path. He had to make his way across rough and broken trails, fording rushing mountain streams and pushing through almost impenetrable forests. Most famous of the routes crossing the Alleghenys was Braddock's road, formerly an Indian trail, used in 1754 by the general in his expedition against the French at Duquesne or Pittsburgh.

For the settlers who managed to establish homes and raise crops in the midwest, a commercial outlet for their

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produce became very necessary. In the spring those living on large streams and rivers could build flat boats and take their corn, salt pork and whiskey to New Orleans. This hazardous method was hardly satisfactory, so plans were made for a properly constructed highway between East and West, indispensable for political as well as commercial reasons.

In 1806 Congress authorized a commission to lay out a road to extend from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, on the Ohio river. Wheeling was selected as the crossing because it was on a direct line with the center of Ohio and Indiana, and a safe connection for river navigation.

The right of way for the

road was granted by Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia, and contracts let by the government in 1808 for construction of the turnpike road. From Baltimore to Cumberland there was a state road, so when the first section of the National Road was completed through to Wheeling in 1818, communication was established between tidewater and interior.

Added Profit

Over the new highway began to flow an ever increasing tide of travel, commerce and immigration. To the people in the west it meant an added profit of \$2 on every barrel of flour and pork; to the merchants east it meant the opening of trade with a huge new market; and to the immigrant an easy

route to the great unsettled West.

Following the immigration of the traders and hunters who blazed the path for civilization to follow, and the pioneer soldiers battling with Tecumseh, the Prophet, to make good the white man's claim, there came to the lands along the Wabash a sturdy people who were to lay the foundations for the future prosperity of this Wabash Valley.

In 1832 Terre Haute was a flourishing village of 600 inhabitants. "Doubtless the heart of the early Terre Hautean throbbed with civic pride when in that year the village was incorporated and the first city officers elected. Success for the new town seemed a sure thing. Business was flourishing. True, it was confined to the four sides of the courthouse square, but the

spirit makes the municipality and there was no lack of that.

At this period the chief agricultural product of the surrounding country was Indian corn. This was readily converted into pork, bacon and whiskey, so these commodities with the grain itself became the staples of trade. They made up the cargoes of the flat boats laden for New Orleans and the burden of the wagons hauling over the rough road leading south through Vincennes to the Ohio.

The roads were in reality nothing more than Indian trails, streams were unbridged and mud made the low places well-nigh impossible. Even travel on horseback was accomplished with the utmost difficulty.

The Wabash offered the only route for trade, and the citizens' hopes of commercial income were founded upon the

river. The first steamboat had arrived in 1822, the second in 1826, and in due time they plied regularly, laden with merchandise that had come down the Ohio from Wheeling or up the Mississippi from New Orleans. The flat boat still flourished in spite of the steamboat, and there was a busy boat yard near where the waterworks now stands. Deep laden with four or five thousand bushels of corn or a hundred tons of pork, this awkward craft made the perilous month's trip to the Gulf.

Owing to the lack of roads the greater portion of Indiana was excluded from the growing commercial prosperity that was rapidly bringing settlers to the vicinity of Terre Haute and other flourishing towns along the Wabash and Ohio rivers.

The cry had gone up for the

improvement of these conditions and the legislature had taken steps to speed up internal improvements. But Congress urged by such statesmen as Henry Clay and Thomas Corwin had offered a greater aid to Indiana than could be hoped for through slow moving state legislation. By an act of 1825 it had authorized as a national necessity, commercial and military, the extension of the National Road across Ohio, Indiana and Illinois to the capitol of Missouri.

Great was the joy and satisfaction among the founders of our village when it became known that Terre Haute was located upon the line of the National Road. When the first survey was begun through Vigo County in 1832, the citizens were jubilant. It was indeed auspicious coming in the year the village had

been dignified by incorporation.

The story of the National Road and Terre Haute's stage coach days will be continued.

Cumberland Pike

Tales of gypsies, charms and

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The old Red Lion stagecoaches coming down the Cumberland Pike would stop to change horses and let the passengers get a refreshing drink from the cool, crystal-clear water of the spring at the foot of the hill on what is now land between the old and new U.S. 40 about 1½ miles west of West Terre Haute.

This spring had been running for well over 100 years without fail. The Millers, who operated the Stagecoach Ranch Antique Shop nearby installed an electric pump to avail themselves of this wonderful pure spring water supply, a real treat after the chemical taste of treated city water.

Many Old Tales

There are many old stories connected with this locality. It was once the camping place for the gypsies, who were allowed to pasture their horses for ten cents a head.

One year while camping there, the king and

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queen of the gypsies had a terrible quarrel, and the king stabbed the queen fatally. She lies buried in an unmarked grave somewhere near Derby Hill.

On the site where the Washington Avenue Presbyterian Church now stands, southeast corner of Sixth and Washington, the gypsies were camped in 1856.

Ada Reed Caton who owned the property at 1304 S. 11th St. at one time told me of a gypsy-related incident. On this property stood the largest elm tree in Indiana. The venerable forest tree was over 100 feet tall, and measured over 450 feet around its top (the equivalent of more than the length of a

city block). The trunk was 18 feet in circumference, with a diameter of nearly six feet. It was only slightly smaller than the famous Corydon Elm.

Hearing of the famous tree, one of the gypsies walked over to see it. He nailed a horseshoe on it, saying that as long as the horseshoe remained on the tree it would come to no harm.

This "gypsy charm" made quite an impression on Mrs. Caton's father, John H. Reed, only 12 years old at that time. Strangely enough, no harm did come to the tree until about 1952 when the horseshoe disappeared from the tree, and soon after there was some storm damage and

a big limb had to be removed.

Reed was a Civil War veteran, serving three years in Company C, Thirty-first Indiana Infantry, and fought in the Battle of Lookout Mountain. The regiment's Lieutenant Leonard Mahan, a lifelong friend, lived in the same neighborhood before and after the Civil War.

Gypsies and horse stealing have always been associated together, but the old elm tree served in a different capacity. Before the Civil War, bands of Indians used to come through here with many fine horses. One time this proved to be too great a temptation, and some of the horses were stolen.

Since horse stealing was punishable by death at that time, nine white men were hung from this old tree.

King Of The Gypsies

One of the largest Hungarian gypsy families in the United States is still located in Fort Wayne, Ind. Members of the gypsy tribe have spread across the

nation, but all returned in April, 1978, to attend the funeral of Louis Ziko, the gypsy monarch who ruled for 53 years. He became king in 1925 upon the death at nearby Angola, Ind., of his father, Steven Ziko.

The 74-year-old patriarch died from a long illness. Tommy Ziko, 32, the second eldest son, succeeded him as king of the gypsies. While son Tommy became king, Ziko's widow, Bina, remains queen for the rest of her life.

His daughter, Princess Lena, explained that the traditional mourning continued for six weeks. "There are many spirits to satisfy," she said.

Although Tommy was not the eldest son, he was elevated to king because he was his father's right-hand man. He helped with family problems and kept bad gypsies out of Fort Wayne.

More than 1,000 mourners, members of the tribe from California, Texas, Boston, San Francisco and other places, joined local tribe members and attended the funeral. Many arrived in Cadillacs and Lincolns and rode to the city's largest cemetery for the burial.

Ziko was attired in a brown suit. A crucifix and dollar bills were laid atop him and full bottles of beer were placed in the coffin beside him.

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Building the old National Road

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

The survey for the National Road west of Indianapolis was begun Sept. 10, 1827. It started from a stake at the west edge of the town plat and continued on Washington Street to the White river. It was noted that a bridge 356 feet in length would be needed and the site for the west end of the bridge was located north of a notched buckeye tree.

Passing the homes of three settlers, 10 or 12 more clearings were noted between there and Terre Haute, each being on the bank of a water course.

After struggling for over a month through heavy forests, wading creeks, and running their lines through the swampy lowlands, the surveyors came upon Jenckes' distillery about five miles east of Terre Haute and located on the road a few feet to the south.

This must have been a red letter day although it was on the 13th of October. The next day was Sunday, which must have been enjoyed near the distillery, but on Monday morning the surveyors started on across the Harrison Prairie which was covered by water about a foot deep.

By nightfall they had reached the edge of Terre Haute at the east end of Wabash Street and had located

the road along that street to the Wabash river.

The survey had passed through heavy timber from the eastern line of the state until it reached the Harrison Prairie. Three days later the survey was completed to the Illinois state line which was marked by a stake near a notched elm tree and 13 chains, 12 links from the "six mile tree" on the state line.

The survey was continued to Vandalia, then the capital of Illinois, and finally the road was located to the Mississippi river, but it was never graded and bridged by the government beyond Vandalia.

The first appropriations for opening the road in Indiana were made in 1829. The amount was \$51,600. It provided that the work should be carried on both east and west from Indianapolis under two superintendents, each of whom was to be paid \$800 a year.

Homer Johnson and John Milroy were appointed and in June advertised for proposals to cut the timber for a road 80 feet wide, remove the stumps in the central 30 feet and do the necessary grading. It was planned to work east and west from Indianapolis until the appropriation was exhausted, but the settlers made such objection that Washington sent word to change the specifications.

New ones were drawn that did not provide for removing the stumps. It was provided, however, that no stumps were to be over 15 inches high and that those in the center of the road were to be rounded and trimmed so as to present no serious obstruction to carriages.

On Oct. 3rd, Milroy wrote from Terre Haute that contracts had been completed for the entire distance across the state, the average price being \$121 a mile, leaving, as he said, a handsome surplus for future work.

A few weeks later additional instructions came from Washington to have the stumps grubbed out (after the grading was finished, of course). This cost about \$75 a mile and left a series of holes and mounds that made the road impassable. Many complaints were made, and those in charge of the project still hoped that Congress would have it graded and bridged.

During the next 10 years, Congress made an additional appropriation each year for the work in Indiana. The act of 1831 provided for a bridge over White river. Five years later a bridge was authorized over the Wabash river. Stone was hauled for this bridge

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but it was never built. A ferry was used instead until a toll bridge was built several years later by private enterprise.

By 1834 the road extended across Indiana. A large force of men was working that year on the grades and embankments in Vigo County. Many of the pioneers made their start in life with money earned by working on the National Road. They were paid 62½ cents a day, which was higher than the usual rate of pay for labor.

It is recorded that among those who shoveled dirt on the National Road in Clay County during the spring of 1833 was Morgan Ringo who earned in this way the money to buy his first 40 acres. He later became the heaviest taxpayer in the county.

Farmers supplied many teams and many of the contractors and builders who came to work on the road became permanent settlers. It brought enthusiasm and prosperity. High grades were thrown across swamps, substantial bridges were built by qualified engineers, and for the first time, a road was made able to withstand the spring freshets that had washed away the weaker embankments of the early settlers.

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A journey down the National Road

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

When the National Road was surveyed across Indiana, the only town between Centerville on the eastern boundary and Terre Haute near the western boundary was Indianapolis, the capital in the woods. Within the next few years, many new towns were located along the busy highway.

West of Indianapolis, Plainfield, Belleville, Stilesville, Putnamville and Harmony were established and became prosperous towns. The growth of these towns, however, came to an end when the T.H.&I. Railroad swung to the north to Greencastle and missed them.

Brazil, the largest town established in Indiana along the National Road, was not located until 1844 and six years later had only 84 inhabitants, but its location on the main line of travel finally caused the county seat to be moved there from Bowling Green. The first relay station for changing horses on the stage line east of Terre Haute was at the present site of Brazil. For several years it was the only building there.

The National Road became a busy thoroughfare. Over its long stretches passed a procession of stage and mail coaches, express carriers, emigrants and wagoners with heavy loads of freight. Wagon house yards were located along the line, where the tired horses rested over night beside their great loads.

Taverns, famous in their day, were built at convenient points for the stages that were constantly arriving and departing.

In 1832, before the road was in condition for fast travel, the stage line of P. Beers was advertised to make the trip from Indianapolis to Dayton in 2½ days. This included stopping overnight in a tavern. In later years when they drove straight through, they averaged about 150 miles a day in good weather.

Every traveler was welcomed with generous hospitality by the settlers of those days, but travel became so heavy that in self-defense some of those who lived along the highway were compelled to hang out tavern signs to indicate that some charges would be made. The usual rates were 25 cents for a bed or meal and many comfortable fortunes were made at these rates.

By 1832 the legislature realized the need for some regulations and provided that before a tavern keeper should be permitted to retail liquor he should have at least one spare room with two beds and bedding, good stabling for at least four horses and should keep posted in his public rooms the rates for food, lodging, stabling and liquor.

The first log taverns often had rooms where the guests were glad to sleep together upon the floor, but better taverns were available also. Indianapolis offered Washington Hall, Mansion House, later known as Union Hotel and Democrat headquarters until the Palmer House was built. The "Sun Tavern" was a favorite inn for those who arrived on horseback. Its swinging sign over

the door depicted the rising sun in brilliant color.

At Mt. Jackson (where the state owned hospital is now on Washington Street), was the Bolton's famous inn. A few miles further west of Indianapolis was the Hartsock Tavern at Bridgeport and the Ohio House at Plainfield. In Putnam County were the twin taverns known as the Tecumseh and Washington Hall, and farther on in Putnamville was the Eagle House.

During the busy years of the road there were nine taverns along the stretch in Clay County alone. One of the best, known as Kennedy's, was at the crossing of the state road to Rockville and Bowling Green, while on the hill west of where Brazil now stands was Cunningham's Tavern, which later on was enlarged and a race course added where Terre Haute sportsmen trained their horses. Across the road from Cunningham's was the Usher homestead built in 1838 and thought by many to be the finest dwelling in that part of Indiana.

The first tavern in Terre Haute was the Eagle and Lion. When the highway reached the town of 800 inhabitants, the principal hotel was the Early House. The Prairie House was temporarily closed down waiting for a new proprietor.

All along the road were wagon houses that offered their hospitality to the hundreds engaged in the freight traffic. Most of these wagon houses were located at the edge of the larger towns where prices were

more reasonable than at the inns near the center of business. These wagon houses were surrounded by commodious yards for the horses.

In all of the taverns and wagon houses were great fireplaces in which huge logs were burned, whose fires lighted up the rooms during the winter evenings. Here the drivers and passengers were glad to spread their blankets and sleep through the night when other accommodations could not be had.

The taverns were the centers of the social life of the day. Many a dance was held on their puncheon floors to music played by the old time fiddlers. Judges, riding the circuits, together with members of the bar, made them their headquarters and within their walls were planned many of the strategies of those heated campaigns that swept the old Indian fighter, William Henry Harrison, into office to the tune of "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too."

During these years both Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren traveled across Indiana along the National Road making speeches at the important towns. Clay had always been a champion of the road, but Van Buren had opposed internal improvements by the federal government. When his coach tipped over in the worst mud hole at Plainfield, many thought that this supposed "accident" had been arranged to give him an object lesson on the importance of keeping the highway in good repair.

T s MAY 29 1983

Autos raced along old National Road

National Road 45

By Dorothy J. Clark

By 1923 the National Road was paved from Indianapolis to Plainfield and surfaced on to Terre Haute with only a few gaps here and there. Thousands of speed-crazy Americans now drove cars. One out of every six persons in Indiana owned a car in 1923.

Despite warning signs and regardless of traffic signals (called silent policemen in the Roaring Twenties), the accident and death rate soared. Once stage coaches turned over, now it was automobiles.

Racing began in Indiana when the auto industry was in its infancy. The Indianapolis Speedway grew out of a bicycle course laid down when wheeling was the great American pastime.

When Charles Duryea flung open his shed doors and rolled out the first American made motor carriage in July, 1892, life on the old turnpike, the National Road, was revived. By 1896, Duryea was turning out 12 cars a year.

Soon other makes of automobiles were being manufactured. Avid customers, the highway's first daredevils, snapped up 2,500 Olds in 1902. Henry Ford's Model T, the famous Tin Lizzie, sold for \$950 in

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1909, but was reduced to \$550 in 1913.

It became necessary for states through which the National Road ran to appropriate money and set road gangs to work. Improvement brought more traffic. The early tourist, wrapped in linen duster and wearing goggles, took a lot of punishment. He carried spare gasoline in tin cans until a few blacksmiths and drug stores began to sell fuel. He lighted his head lights with a match, patched his own tires, and hired a nearby farmer to pull him out of the mud when he got stuck.

Long distance motoring called for careful planning. Spare parts included spark plugs, high-tension and low-tension cables, extra valves and springs, tire chains, jack, cutting pliers, tire casings, inner tubes, casing patches, along with a shovel and rope.

If the traveler intended to camp along the way, he packed bacon, coffee and canned goods. Many an auto camper pitched a tent and lighted a fire where countless movers had unyoked oxen and stopped their Conestoga wagons.

Old timers along the National Road relished the true yarn of the

race between Patrick Dailey and Harry McGee which took place in 1913.

Before midday, farmers, their wives and children, lined the National Road between Indianapolis and Terre Haute, sitting in horse-drawn carriages and wagon beds. In the towns, bets were placed, and even the residents of Putnamville and Shady Garden made up purses.

The race was more than a competition between auto and train. This 1913 speed contest was a grudge fight between two types of transportation, but even more, it was a bitter professional feud between McGee, auto driver extraordinary, and Dailey, crack engineer of the Pennsylvania Flyer on the 72-mile run between the two cities.

The Irish engineer boasted that nothing on wheels could beat a train with an able crew and a strong-backed fireman who knew how to spread coal. McGee knew cars and he did not agree with Dailey's boast that it was nonsense to say an auto could travel faster than a train.

McGee lost his patience and challenged Dailey to a contest.

Plans were drawn, judges appointed and every detail arranged. Train and Cadillac left Indianapolis precisely at the same moment. Railroad supporters crowded the coaches. Automobile enthusiasts parked along the road.

Spectators caught only a fleeting glimpse of the contestants flashing by. Dailey's engine threw up spirals of white smoke, and McGee's Cadillac was weighted down with sandbags and a giant Negro man. Every time McGee hit a bump (and the road was full of them), the Negro bounced into the air, so that delighted observers saw daylight between him and the sandbags he was vainly trying to keep in place.

At Terre Haute men fingered their watches. Dailey was never late. They kept an eye on the National Road, too. McGee was known as a determined driver. A dot showed on the highway at the same time the tracks began to hum.

The Pennsylvania train was coming down the rails, flashing by fields and telegraph poles. A great roar went up from the crowd. Then McGee took the last turn, skidded to a stop and stepped onto the station platform in plenty of time to greet the crestfallen engineer. The Cadillac had made the 72 miles in 72 minutes.

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National Road eased travel woes

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Note: This week's column continues the early transportation of the Wabash Valley begun last week...

The typical cargo flatboats used to take corn and pork raised by the early farmers of the Wabash Valley traveled down to New Orleans. There, the boats were frequently sold for lumber along with the cargo, and the boatmen walked back to their homes.

For a long time after roads pushed their way across the state, the river was still the chief artery for travel and commerce.

Land surveyors and land offices barely preceded the migration of settlers into the Wabash Valley. Land companies were established to make possible the legal purchase of property.

The trails were a far cry from the smooth concrete highways we have today. Traveling New Englanders were harassed by a road that was narrow, bumpy, full of boulders and stumps of trees.

On swampy ground, where dirt roads easily became a quagmire, logs were laid side-by-side in a corduroy effect. Even so, streams still had to be forded.

All in all, it was not a pleasant journey; and many travelers became ill and even died along the way. However, the excitement to join the westward movement was a fever pitch, and hardships were taken in stride.

Squatters, traders, trappers and adventurous bachelors in search of Western claims made up most of the early travelers. Others were immigrants almost directly from Europe. Unable to find a satisfactory place to settle in the fast-growing Eastern cities, they migrated inland.



Historically Speaking

By Dorothy Clark
Special to the Tribune-Star

Many came to the Wabash Valley and established small colonies. Here they built homes, churches and schools. They began farming or opened shops, trading native skills and products for a new way of life.

Early in 1803, Ohio became the 17th state in the nation. The War of 1812 hardly slowed the migration of people along the Trace laid by Ebenezer Zane.

Jammed with cargo-laden crafts, the Ohio River was flowing in the wrong direction to be useful to settlers heading into northern Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois.

By 1818, the much-needed National Road had reached Wheeling, W.Va., and by 1837 had reached the Indiana boundary.

It was an exciting event to watch this first major roadway stretch this way across the almost virgin landscape. Surveyors pushed through first, followed by gangs of axe-men.

Horse and ox-drawn plows, graders and ditchers carved a roadbed, which was then covered with a thick gravel surface. The final phase was the building of stone bridges (some S-shaped) and culverts. Finally, stone mile-markers were set in place. Many of these markers still can be seen when traveling along U.S.

40.

This magnificent new road, offering thousands of travelers a relatively safe and easy access both east and west, all the way from Maryland to Indiana and Illinois, was soon filled with a ceaseless parade of pack horses, Conestoga freight wagons, passenger coaches and droves of livestock.

Less fortunate travelers camped along the roadside, sleeping under their wagons, as they always had. Ten to 15 miles represented a good day's journey, so inns soon sprang up along the National Road to accommodate the many travelers who could afford better.

The relay station was usually maintained by coach-line companies for the exchange of horses, with the coach delayed only for a minute or two.

The wagon stands were used primarily for overnight stops by Conestoga Wagon drivers and by livestock farmers.

Accommodations were simple, but food and drink were plentiful. The stage houses or taverns, forerunners of today's turnpike plazas, offered sleeping accommodations for many travelers in a single room, food and drink, and usually a large yard for wagons, pens for livestock, and feed for the many animals traveling over the road.

After pulling in at a tavern stop, the driver's first job was to see to the welfare of his animals. Finishing that, he ate, drank, and swapped news and tall tales. He relaxed, smoking long, thin, black cigars and retired early. A good night's sleep was necessary to be ready for another rigorous day on the road.

Stage coaches exchanged horses before pushing on to the next state house, where more

luxurious accommodations were available to the bone-weary and bruised passengers. Running on a tight schedule, a passenger had little more than a minute to stretch his legs before fresh horses were hitched, and the stage moved on.

The taverns and inns along the National Road were more than stopping places for travelers. They linked the source of news, a meeting place for strangers and friends alike, the source of work, and the center of community life.

Small boys with chores finished at home, were attracted to the inn yard to watch in fascination the much-admired wagoners and stage drivers. During a busy period, they might even be lucky enough to wangle a job helping water and curry the horses, or help pen a flock of sheep.

Many of the inns became small towns as people moved into the area and found this wayside haven the natural hub for the political, social and economic life of the new settlers.

Despite the National Road, heavy forests still covered much of the Wabash Valley, and roads served only a relatively small part of the state. Waterways were, in the early decades of the 1800s, still the best and most practical way to open the entire area to settlement and commerce.

The federal government donated millions of acres for canals that were to eventually cost millions of dollars. They also were to bankrupt the State of Indiana!

Next week's column will continue transportation history...

Community Affairs File

VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

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Crossroads of America

National Road carried land travelers to city

Clark, Dorothy *① Roads, State, History*
TS FEB 02 1992
Terre Haute's first settlers arrived by the Wabash River, but even before that land seekers came in by the Old Army Road opened by William Henry Harrison on his march from Vincennes to Tippecanoe.

That was still the only means of travel until a road was surveyed in 1821 from the future state capital, Indianapolis. About the same time a road was started to Richmond, when government surveyors, moving slowly from the east laying out the National Road, reached the Indiana state line. Here they discovered that the direct line from Columbus to Indianapolis would cross a small creek several times and miss Richmond by a few miles.

They advised Washington this could be avoided if they went south a few miles on the state line and passed through Richmond and Cambridge on a state road already in operation. According to their notes made in 1827, the road from Terre Haute to Indianapolis presented no such difficulty, so they followed this state road very closely, referring to "mile trees" on the road.

As they approached Terre Haute

Historically speaking



By Dorothy J. Clark
Special to The Tribune-Star

Clark retired as The Tribune-Star's women's editor in 1980. She has written a local history column since 1956. She is Vigo County Historian.

Community Affairs File

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

continued into town on the same angle as it now bears until it passed Ninth Street, then far out into the country.

Instead of continuing down Wabash Avenue, the survey ran directly at the same angle and closed with "the intersection of Fifth and Ohio streets in the Town of Terre Haute." They planned nothing but building a bridge across the river.

It is said that the czar of Russia used a method for laying out roads somewhat similar to our own government's method. He laid a ruler across the map and drew a straight line from one point to the other.

In our case, after leaving Wheeling on the Ohio River, the line ran directly to Columbus, the capital of Ohio, and directly to Indianapolis, and from there to Vandalia, then the capital of Illinois.

A direct line from Vandalia to the capital of Missouri would have crossed the Mississippi River at Alton, but the engineers headed their line toward St. Louis, then as now the largest city on the river. Naturally, the Illinois legislature favored building up one of their own cities and the dispute finally ended when the government abandoned the whole project and the states took it over.

The main travel on the National Road still followed this route across the river by a ferry at the foot of Ohio Street. The story is told that

when Chauncey Rose built the Prairie House he diverted traffic by building a fence along the south side between the present Eighth and Ninth streets and the bend in the street still shows his choice of the route.

While the 1827 survey carried the road to a proposed bridge at the foot of Wabash Street, later known as National Road Street, from the west bank of the river the National Road cut across the bottoms to reach the high ground on the west as it does today.

There were two other roads across the bottoms: the Paris Road, much as it is now, and the River Road. But much of the year they were almost impassable. Not until the heavy travel began on the National Road was any plan to bridge the river on the National Road attempted.

Apparently no contract was let, as though the engineers intended to build the bridge themselves, because in 1858 the stone on the west bank intended for the bridge with two barges and a tow boat were sold and the stone used to build the piers for the old covered railroad bridge of the Terre Haute & Alton Railroad, later a part of the Big Four system. This is the stone which forms the west abutments and part of the piers of the present bridge. A dispute with the state of Illinois caused abandonment of the project.

The first bridge at the foot of Ohio Street was merely an open plank trestle supported on piling driven into the river bed. This frequently failed during high water when it was damaged and impassable to traffic.

On one occasion the steamboat American Star rammed the bridge and carried away part of it. A lengthy lawsuit was decided in favor of the bridge owners.

According to C.C. Oakey, a storm caused the steamboat Crescent to be blown into the bridge, causing

heavy damage. During some construction work a man was killed and another injured so severely he died later.

In the early Fifties the Drawbridge Co., owners of the bridge at that time, decided to build a bridge at the foot of Wabash Street and used most of the timber from the old bridge in its construction. High water frequently made the road impassable to vehicles, and a causeway was built after estimates showed the middle of three routes was the most desirable one. With a few changes, this is the present route from Terre Haute to West Terre Haute.

The original grade went to meet the bridge at Ohio Street, and when the Wabash Street bridge was built, a spur was built from it to meet the grade, hence the bend in the road after leaving the bridge. After the grade was built, supposedly above any high water, there came the flood of 1858, surpassing the previous record of 1828.

Because of the two railroads and the National Road grades, this vicinity had forced the water to rise much higher. In 1864 the Terre Haute Drawbridge Co. built the old covered bridge. In 1870 this was bought by the county and made a free bridge.

In 1905 the traction company built a street-car line from the end of the bridge to Macksville carrying the trolley wire through the old bridge, but the passengers transferred through it. Agitation for a new bridge resulted in the erection of the present highway bridge.

The bridge now scheduled for demolishing and replacing was an exception to most county contracts in that the engineers were Professor Malverd A. Howe of Rose Polytechnic Institute and Pennsylvania engineer F.A. Starbuck, and the work was completed on time with no extras.

from the eastern bluff (near where Highland Lawn Cemetery is now), the land from the foot of the hill almost to Terre Haute was covered with a foot or more of water. For this reason the middle of the road from the foot of the hill to the present 19th Street was raised 4 feet to 5 feet above the natural grade.

This situation still existed as late as 1890, even though Lost Creek, which overflowed this area, had been diverted near the poor farm and found its outlet to the river north of Fort Harrison.

As late as the Eighties, what is now 19th Street south, carried off the surplus water by what was called the "corporation ditch," which marked the extreme limit of the city.

The route of the state road